

DDI-624-69

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3 March 1969

Executive Registry  
69-1247

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Pathans

Summary

About two weeks ago, a group of pro-regime Pakistani Pathans reportedly took to the streets of Karachi to fight opposition demonstrators. Pathan support of President Ayub Khan--a Pathan himself--has been fostered by the considerable influence Pathans have achieved in the Pakistani army and government. With Ayub's decision to step down, the Pathans will probably back politicians who support their traditional demands for regional autonomy. The fiercely-independent tribesmen inhabit both sides of the Pakistani-Afghan border and are the dominant element in the Peshawar-Khyber Pass area.

1. The Pathans--or Pushtuns, as they are known in Afghanistan--are the turbulent and highly independent denizens of the hills straddling the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier. Although they constitute only five percent of Pakistan's population of 130 million, they have exerted an influence in the army and government out of all proportion to their numbers and have been among the strongest supporters of President Ayub--a Pathan himself.

2. Under Ayub's administration, the traditionally independent and turbulent Pathans of Pakistan have enjoyed an unusual measure of freedom within their tribal areas in the province of West Pakistan, where they have been allowed to govern themselves much as they please and enforce the law as they see fit. Some Pathans have even given up the nomad life and emigrated to several of the larger West Pakistan cities, including the largest, Karachi. This degree of tribal freedom, plus the hope of still greater autonomy, has largely vitiated support from within West Pakistan for the concept of

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a free and independent "Pushtunistan" periodically espoused by the government of Afghanistan to mollify its 8 million Pushtuns. This issue has in the past embittered Pakistani-Afghan relations, bringing the two countries to the brink of war in 1955 and 1961.

3. Despite their relatively small numbers, the Pathans' fiercely martial nature and tight-knit society make them a valuable asset to anyone seeking power in West Pakistan. Opposition politicians have therefore toured the northwest frontier area hinting at still greater autonomy for its inhabitants, and managed to stir up anti-regime riots even in this citadel of Ayub's supporters. About two weeks ago, however, armed Pathans backing Ayub took to the streets of Karachi and engaged opposition demonstrators in bloody fighting. This is exactly the kind of behavior for which frontier Pathans are famous, although--

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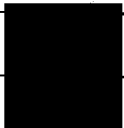

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4. Now that Ayub has decided to step down, regional sentiment is on the rise in the frontier area, and Peshawar, the leading frontier city, is rife with speculation that West Pakistan may again be broken up into regional provinces. With Ayub going and constitutional changes in the wind, the Pathans are likely to support those politicians who back their demands for greater regional autonomy.

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<b>Remarks:</b>  <p style="text-align: center;">Attached for the Director's information, in response to his request, is a note on the Pathans in Pakistan.</p> 			
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